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ABSTRACT

In forming a theory of communicative interaction between human beings it is necessary to consider some general features implicit in the communicative process. These include the context of situation, philosophical categories, psycholinguistic categories, grammatical categories, and nonverbal categories. Most of these are extra-linguistic and have to do with the social contexts or conceptual conditions. Language and nonverbal acts operate together in a synchronized, coordinated way in human communication. Understanding of the nonverbal input into the speech act will contribute to understanding of the meaning of the speech act. Of particular interest is the context of situation, which comprises the why, how, when, where, who with, what, and under what circumstances. This involves the choice of channel of communication, such as acoustical, optical, tactual, or chemical; the temporal element and the time duration; the location and the space/distance relationship; the description and relationships of the speaker-hearer, as well as the non-participants, or the audience in the surroundings; the physical condition of the surroundings--amount of light, noise, silence, and artifacts; the zeitgeist in which the society finds itself; the individual idiosyncratic condition of the participants; and, finally, the style of communication in the medium and the genre used. The context of situation affects profoundly and with controlling influence the choices in language, from pronunciation features to syntax, larger structures, and nonverbal behavior. An analysis without these considerations could only be done in an extremely narrow sense, and this might be almost useless with regard to meaning. (Author/HW)

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April 1973

NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR IN SPEECH ACTS

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I Introduction

A theory of communicative interaction between human beings must deal with a seemingly infinite variety of possible behaviors that can be produced by people. The communication process is a dynamic composite with many sub-systems interacting and relating to each other in intricately complex ways. In order to understand the many varieties of speech acts and all communicative acts, it is necessary, first of all, to consider some general features implicit in the communicative process.

II General features implicit in communication

The general features which I propose would include, roughly, the context of situation, philosophical categories, psycholinguistic categories, grammatical categories, and nonverbal categories. Most of these are extra-linguistic and have to do with the social contexts or conceptual conditions. Language is not a homogeneous entity, and its syntax cannot be described within itself, apparently, as we have witnessed the travail of the last generation of linguists, in addition to the deep thinking of previous centuries. In other words, the study of syntax, like the gal from Oklahoma, has gone about as fer as it kin go, and is doomed to sterility unless other extra-linguistic features are considered in the analysis. Another way to define extra-linguistic features is to acknowledge them as insights provided by other disciplines.

In discussions on language, early recognition of these dimensions obviates lengthy digressions on ambiguity and ungrammaticality. People who use language are not nearly as troubled about ambiguity and ungrammaticalness as linguists who seem to spend an inordinate amount of time niggling about them. The expression, "I'm looking for a house with green shutters" may occur, e.g., as an inquiry in a real estate office, or as a statement while driving around a new housing section looking for a particular address.

The philosopher, J. L. Austin, (pp. 33, 62) discusses other potentially ambiguous expressions in terms of constative and performative verbs: "It's yours", meaning a bestowing or bequeathing of a gift, or simply a statement that it belongs to the person already. "There's a bull in the field" can be either a warning or a constative, describing the scenery. "I shall be there" can be either a promise or a statement. If some general features of communication were stated first these expressions could not be considered ambiguous.

The dimensions of the context of situation are inherent in every communication item; they affect and control communication between human beings. The media would be an important feature to note, for example: [+ written] [+ spoken].

Philosophical categories might include such things as intention, logic, true-false, and other ingredients which the philosopher could contribute to understanding and description of language. More specifically, the description could include features such as [+ true] [+ legendary] [+ performative] or whatever might be decided by the collaboration of linguists and philosophers.

Psycholinguistic categories might include elements such as those concerned with cognitive processes, the WHY's of syntax, developmental stages, individual differences, and second language interference.

Grammatical categories have been discussed by Boas, Jespersen, Sapir and Swadesh, and Whorf, and more recently by generative grammarians, but the surface has only been scratched. The categories have to do with such things as number, gender, sex, density, age, shape, dimensional, penetrable, positional, status, supernatural, visible, proximate, knowledgable, animate, and definite. There are others. I approached one of these, the category of sex, not gender, in a recent article on the linguistic behavior of male and female.

The nonverbal component would consist of a set of features that would make statements on posture, facial expression, body movement, and paralinguistic

intonations. Although language may be thought of as carrying the heavier load of communication, particularly in the information-giving function, much communication takes place principally or exclusively by nonverbal means. Elsewhere I have stated (Key, 1970, p. 17) that emotional and attitudinal communication "is expressed primarily by means of paralanguage and kinesics, and not by language per se."

Language and nonverbal acts operate together in a synchronized, coordinated way in human communication. Language rhythm is synchronized with the rhythm of body movement. The shape or design of the movement, the muscular contraction effort, and the flow of movement are matched with intonational features of pitch, stress, and length of language. The nonverbal components may be in accordance to the message or contradictory to it; in fact, they reflect the real message. Understanding of the nonverbal input into the speech act will contribute to understanding of the meaning of the speech act.

The theoretical framework of communication would specify these dimensions as outlined briefly, before actual grammatical structures were discussed. The large general features of communication would be stated for every verbal act. Specific features would be stated within each general category. Such a description of a dialogue, of course, would approach a government document in size, but theoretically, such completeness would be desirable for a theory of communication, or of language.

III Split-brain theories and origins of verbal and nonverbal systems

The origin of language and its varieties lies in the brain. Recent investigation gives evidence that there are differences in the right and left hemispheres of the brain that have to do with language behavior, such as perception and use of auditory and visual channels, expressive vocalizations, melody (pitch in intonation and paralanguage), movement (gestures and hand/

facial accompaniments) in speech acts.

IV Context of situation

The context of situation comprises, briefly, the why, how, when, and where, the who with, the what, and under what circumstances. This involves the choice of channel of communication, such as acoustical, optical, tactual, or chemical; the temporal element and time duration; the location and the space/distance relationship; the description and relationships of the speaker-hearer, as well as the non-participants, or the audience in the surroundings; the physical condition of the surroundings which concern amount of light, noise, silence, and artifacts; the Zeitgeist which the society finds itself in; the individual idiosyncratic condition of the participants; and finally, the style of communication in the medium and the genre used. Many of these conditions have been discussed in sociolinguistic studies and in other descriptions of varieties of language. There are large bibliographies surrounding such scholars as Bright, Fishman, Gumperz, Hymes, and Labov.[1]

The notion of a situational context for language was introduced by Dr. Philipp Wegener in his "Situationstheorie" in 1885 (Firth, pp. 42-43). Gardiner credited Wegener with these notions and Malinowski was the first to use the term 'context of situation' widely in English. Firth's writings in the early 1930's reflect his work with Malinowski, and his embracing the concept influenced the London school in their work with language. I have expanded the concept to include a host of ideas.

Malinowski stated clearly that his view was "to correlate the study of language with that of other activities [and] to interpret the meaning of each utterance within its actual context; [and] to define meaning in terms of experience and situation." (p. 9) He believed that words do not exist in isolation, (p. 22) and he went on to suggest that ". . . it is very profitable

in linguistics to widen the concept of context so that it embraces not only spoken words but facial expression, gesture, bodily activities, the whole group of people present during an exchange of utterances and the part of the environment on which these people are engaged." (p. 22)

Sapir and Swadesh, in their discussion of American Indian grammatical categories reiterated the idea that ". . . no language response can be separated from the contextual pattern in which it occurs." Edward T. Hall, the anthropologist who contributed the term "proxemics", stated that ". . . man and his enviroment participate in molding each other." (p. 4) "Man's relationship to his enviroment is a function of his sensory apparatus plus how this apparatus is conditioned to respond." (p. 59)

Austin, in his treatment of performative verbs, took into consideration the "total situation", "circumstances of the utterance", and "context of the utterance" (pp. 34, 52, 69, 76, 89, 100). It can be seen that for many of his classes of performative verbs, depending upon these circumstances that he speaks of, nonverbal behavior may substitute for speech, e.g., permission, a head nod; order, by pointing; accepting a bet, a handshake; pronounce guilt, stern facial expression or silence; "out", the umpire's arm gesture; reprimand, a glare; consent,a head nod or a wink. (Key, 1972 b, p. 6) Consideration of extra-linguistic evidence, such as context of situation, and nonverbal behavior, is an aid in distinguishing between performative and constative, or statement verbs. For example, "I promise. . ." is, indeed, not a performatory promise when it is spoken between children and the verbal act is accompanied by non-serious behavior, such as giggling and squirming, that indicate it is to be interpreted as a joke.

With a little brain-storming, it is easy to come up with different examples of syntax that could be appropriate expressions in various situations.

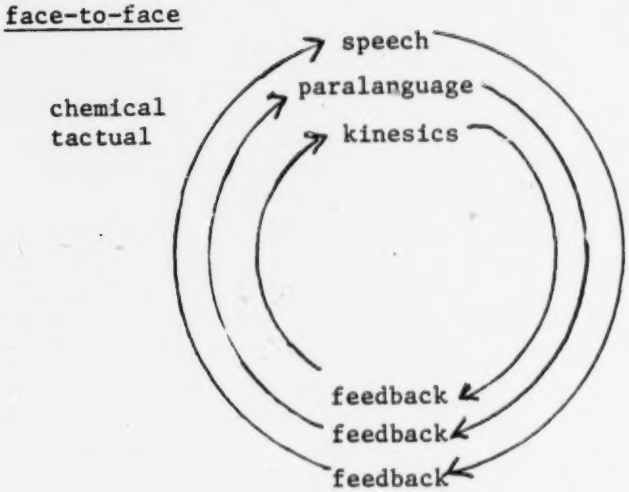
An example is a greeting form, "Hi!", "Hello", "How do you do?" a hand wave or a head nod, depending upon the place and persons involved. Or imagine the different syntax used in ordering a sumptuous dinner at a fine restaurant as compared with calling for a hot dog at Greasy Joe's. Trying to determine grammaticality is irrelevant.

COMMUNICATION

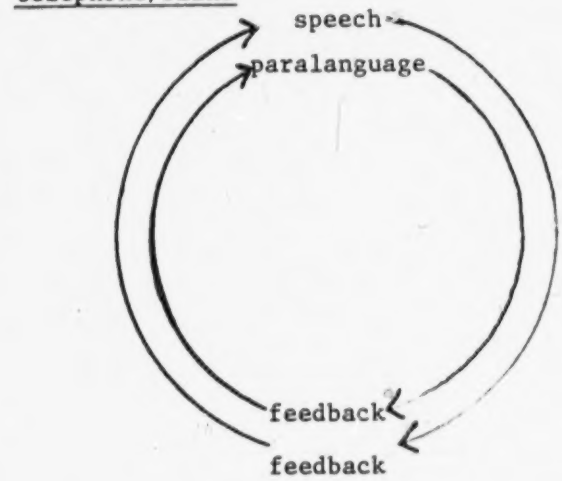
~~6b.~~ 7

Channels: acoustical, optical, tactual, chemical, electrical

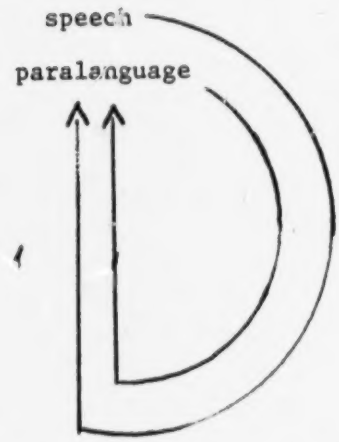
face-to-face



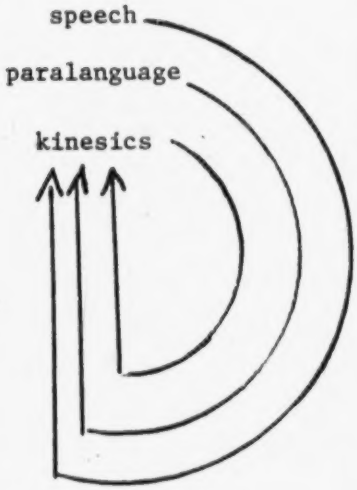
telephone/blind



radio/tape-recorder



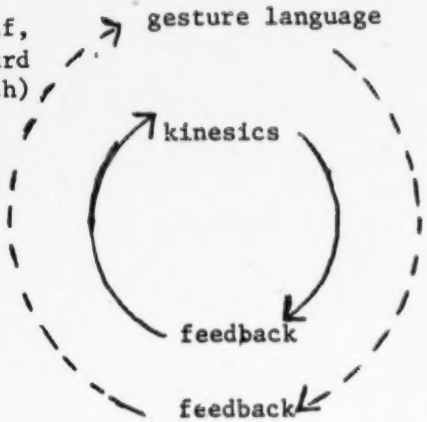
TV



SURROGATES:

sign lg. (deaf, Indian, guard at the beach)

in addition: tactual some noises



writing

Media

The Media determine the channel of communication which can be used: acoustical, optical, tactual, chemical, electric. Written language exemplifies different syntactical structures from spoken language. Written language has to fill in with adjectives and punctuation for the tone of voice and the voice quality which indicate emotion and attitude in the message conveyed. Consider the differences in the language of an informal penciled note with the language on formal, gilt-edged stationery, and a quick invitation by telephone. A professor might not lecture in the language he or she publishes in. I discussed other differences of written and spoken language in a paper presented in 1971.

Concerning spoken language only, the medium prescribes the particular paralinguistic and gestural acts which can be used in a communicative event. The telephone, for example, permits only paralanguage to accompany the verbal act and precludes any communication by kinesic acts. In a very delicate conversation when feedback is essential, the telephone would not be an appropriate medium. It is not likely that one would ask for a raise by telephone conversation; this kind of dialogue is better handled in a face-to-face situation where the asker can lead up to the goal, minutely recording and responding to the response, which determines whether or not to continue the conversation. Likewise asking for a loan or making a proposal would not be easily handled by telephone. The appearance of phonevision or picturephone, or whatever it might be called, will change the style of telephone conversations significantly.

Conversation on TV without audience response is somewhat altered from a similar type of conversation in front of a live audience. Unless the speaker has wide experience with the medium, he or she may become very awk-

ward and exhibit frustrated expressions because of the lack of response and feedback that one is accustomed to receiving in conversation.

The genre also determines which verbal and nonverbal acts may be used. An obscene gesture might be tolerated in a quotation or a recitation from another culture where it wouldn't be in an actual conversation. Things can happen on the stage that wouldn't happen in the home--or visa versa. The mime, jokes, poetry, and all the varieties of literature have their own repertoire of verbal and nonverbal acts.

Time

> Time interval is a strange and contradictory matter in the mind. It would be reasonable to suppose that a routine time or an eventless time would seem interminable. It should be so, but it is not. It is the dull eventless times that have no duration whatever. A time splashed with interest, wounded with tragedy, crevassed with joy--that's the time that seems long in the memory. And this is right when you think about it. Eventlessness has no posts to drape duration on. From nothing to nothing is no time at all. [2]
>
> John Steinbeck

Temporal aspects affect the communication behavior. The pace differs from event to event. Timing affects paralinguistic acts, which occur as spacing, hesitations, rhythms, durations. . . which all "say" something beyond the words they surround. Timing is acutely important in the gestural acts of a sports event where the ball would be down the field before one could complete a slow or casual gesture. Consider the deletion and telescoping of communication in a three minute long distance telephone call. "Mannerisms" or "affectations" displayed can be interpreted, in part, by pinpointing the event or persons from another temporal point of view. For example, one can recall the recital behavior of a pianist or violinist a generation ago and realize that the facial expressions and body movement were much more exaggerated and dramatic than is exhibited today.

Time is ambiguous in the phrase, "I was going to call you Sunday" when taken out of context. Given the context of situation it is clearly understood to be: 1) Last Sunday, but an interruption kept me from it. 2) Next Sunday, but since you called me, I won't.

Location and Space

"You have to feel space!"
Marcel Marceau[3]

Proxemics is a term which Edward Hall coined to discuss the theories and observations on man's use of social and personal space as a specialized elaboration of culture (p. 1). More than anyone else he has made us aware of the communication--or lack of it--which takes place between human beings by the use of space. His cross-cultural discussions are especially insightful.

Space and distance are relevant in the choice and use of the channels of communication and the hearer's perception of the message. Eye contact cannot be maintained if the distance is too great. Olfactory communication is also useless in that circumstance. Tactile communication is not possible with large spaces separating.

The three facets of intonation: pitch, stress (or loudness), and length (or timing), are adjusted in proportion with space and distance, as well as the location indoors or outdoors. A high-pitched, loud voice might have to be interpreted as emotionally disturbed behavior in a library, at a funeral, or in a very close range with another individual. The same behavior would be perfectly normal speech outside on the volley ball court. Large distances also prescribe careful, precise articulation and judicious choice of words, which would be considered pedantic in the student union. The three elements of intonation mentioned above, pitch, stress, and length, can also be seen

in body movement: shape or design of movement, the muscular contraction effort, and the flow of movement. These, in turn, are affected by space and distance. Extent and deliberation of gesture depends on how well the speaker is seen by the hearer. These behavioral events are distinct from those communications which take place out-of-sight and out-of-hearing, for example, smoke signals which have been used by the Greeks, Romans, on the Great Wall by the Chinese, and of course, by the American Indians, and probably others. Distance signals within sight of signals, but out-of-sight of facial expressions take place by semaphore, flag, and lights. Life-guards pay acute attention (by telescope), to facial expression and rate and quality of movement when the swimmer is out-of-hearing.

Ruesch and Kees show pictures of the spacing that human beings assume when they are gathered together, for example waiting for a bus. The discreet spacing strictly adhered to when people queue in Britain is so precisely measured that one can imagine an invisible string keeping people at a certain distance apart. When this pattern is altered, one can be sure that Americans, or lovers, are in the line! An example of inconsistency of behavior is clearly seen in the American use of space. While the American may shove and push to get to the bus first, he maintains a requisite distance while talking to another person. The distance is less in the Spanish culture. Hall relates what many of us have seen-a Spanish-speaking person walking an American down the hall!

The relationship of living space to the number of occupants will qualify the behavior maintained within. Privacy and human dignity are maintained in one-room living all over the world, by other members of the household turning away or averting the eyes. I recall reading in a Chinese novel about the tender way the members of the family turned away from the young man who

had just been hit by tragedy so that he could cry "in private" in the single room that they all occupied. Even sexual intercourse can occur "in privacy" in the same room, and indeed, in the same bed, in cultures where weather or other conditions prohibit going to the edge of the forest or jungle.

The location in which the behavioral event takes place also has its effect on the choice of verbal and nonverbal acts. Consider the variety of different postures that are assumed in: a posh office, a narrow corridor in a crowded school between classes, on the beach, in the bathroom, in a row-boat. The High School gym can be transformed with flowers and crepe paper, and in turn transform the behavioral events that take place during the few hours of the Senior Prom.

Recognizing that location changes behavior, Barker has as chapter titles: "Structure of the behavior of American and English children" and "The behavior of the same child in different milieus".

Participants

The description of the speaker and hearer(s) implies age, sex, and race or culture, each having its varying set of behavioral norms. In addition, the status or the power relationship of the participants must be noted in order to interpret the communication between them. The persons involved, of course, display several roles even in a single day. A person may be a father, a teacher, a customer, a patient, a client, a group president, a chauffer, etc. "In each case he signals his status by his behavior, his dress, his posture, and his speech style." (Gumperz, p.35) One can imagine the varied para-linguistic effects and kinesic behavior: casual and relaxed, formal, stiff, controlling, and responsive. The role of the widow in some societies demanded that she be shaved and silenced for a long period of mourning. Earlier in

our own society, children used to be seen, but not heard. The role of football players in the United States permits extensive tactual behavior--in a society where men shun a male touch in other situations. Partners on the dance floor--even strangers--hold hands, but the same people would not touch each other in other locations.

To interpret the meaning of behavioral events, it is necessary to know the familiarity and desired goals of the participants. Persons well-known to each other might exhibit behavior which would be bizarre if they were just acquaintances. Public persons are keenly aware of desired goals in their public appearances. Television has added a burden to leaders of society. President Nixon was given extensive exposure during his first Inaugural ceremonies. The Sunday evening formal concert was long and not very lively. During one of the numbers the President leaned forward and started to rest his chin on his hand. In mid-gesture he remembered that the President of the United States doesn't lean on his fist in public! He lowered his hand and raised his head to a dignified posture.

Once I attended a sumptuous reception in the home of an important official, with several friends that I knew well. The location, audience, and role-playing triggered highly exaggerated paralinguistic features in the speech of one of the women--so much so that I didn't recognize this voice that I had known well for many years. One can observe the same phenomenon on occasion when a preacher ascends to the pulpit. The pastoral robe and austerity of the ritual may actually change the voice quality. This has been referred to as the "pulpit voice". His voice returns to normal when he gets outside.

Grimshaw (p. 202) points to the different varieties of language spoken in a situation involving various relationships, e.g., when academicians talk

to janitors. The language varies when the janitor comes into the office while the academician is: alone, with a senior member of administration, a colleague of peer status, with an undergraduate, with another maintenance man, with the professor's wife, with all male participants, with parents of students. Similarly the language changes in another physical setting, such as the elevator or the coffee shop. Such descriptions could be made regarding nonverbal behavior.

An individual continues to display nonverbal behavior when he is alone. Krout studied austistic gestures. Again the location is relevant; the participant's behavior is modified (though perhaps out-of-awareness) if there is the possibility of an observer coming on the scene. When two participants are interacting, the possibilities of communication items are of greater number and variety. Some kinesic and paralinguistic acts only occur between two persons: a handshake and ohter types of greetings, sealing a bargain with the appropriate spat on the ground, a duel, and affection between two loved ones.

Interaction among more than two participants means that at some moments one or more of the participants are also observers--the audience so to speak. Larger gatherings or great audiences again change the repertory of nonverbal acts. In this sense the members of the audience are also participants, and this is important to the performance of the speaker, whether in a formal situation on the stage or informally in a large living room or classroom. Evaluating the performer, as for example, the evaluations from students on a teacher or a class, is only half of the story. The better the audience, the better the performance! As any actor will testify. The audience does not necessarily have to be actively participating in the event. A child may deliver an exquisite performance of misbehavior at the supermarket but would

consider it not worth while at home with only the dog observing.

Even though not allowed to speak, audiences communicate very actively to the performers through nonverbal means. Some nonverbal acts lend themselves to larger groups of participants. Applause is no fun done alone. And a single person doesn't throw a hat into the ring. Furthermore, an audience can also limit permitted behaviors. Whispering displaces talking. Boredom can be expressed by: coughing, whispering, averting eyes from performer. Negative response is communicated variously by: booing, hissing, whistling, cat-calling, heckling, laughing, keeping silent, fidgeting or rustling, shuffling feet, whispering, leaving, yelling, grumbling, sleeping, throwing (eggs, tomatoes, bottles, or pillows), and even entering the dialogue of a stage performance if it is thought to be corny. Agreeable response is communicated by: respectful silence, whistling, laughing, waving, smiling, yelling, standing, dancing, screaming, and throwing (money or flowers). Note that some of these behaviors may occur in either situation, depending on the culture and the circumstances. Cobb discusses the "clappers and the hissers" among various kinds of audiences.

Physical Conditions

Physical conditions, along with social restraints determine which behavior may be used. If in the immediate context there is a noise element which precludes language and paralanguage, the participants are dependent on kinesic acts. The airplane is brought in by gesture alone; ushers communicate by gesture during the stage performance; the crane operator is directed by gesture.

The silence factor is somewhat different from the pauses or hesitations which occur in paralinguistic behavior. Here the silence is part of the context--for religious purposes, expediency, or respect, for example in the

hospital, the library, the theater, or during a funeral. Frequent reference is made to the gesture language of the Trappist monks who maintain silence. Greetings may take the form of a restrained and prescribed silence in some cultures. Some of the Indians in the tropical rain forest of the Amazon greet each other with a ritualistic silence on meeting, even after a period of not seeing each other. Voegelin and Harris discuss the balance of silence and vocal behavior in their statement on language and culture. They refer to the different distribution of talk and silence in different cultures and suggest consideration of nonverbal behavior.

The amount of light and darkness is also of importance in the communication act. In the very dim light of a bar, tactile gestures are of higher incidence where darkness distorts distance perception and also encourages more familiar communication.

Artifacts act as signals that elicit different behavioral patterns. An elegant coiffure or a dinner jacket elicits more formal body movement and can seem to change the interpersonal relationship. A policeman's uniform can make giggling teen-agers sober up.

Zeitgeist

Another aspect of the context of situation is the attitude and atmosphere of the society at the time of the communication item. Extreme conditions, war, hunger, tragedy, and elation modify the behavior of human beings. The posture in standing and walking becomes radically different when the once proud Minister becomes a refugee and has to hunt through garbage pails for a bite to eat. . . or the poverty-stricken student has just won a scholarship!

The military personnel imprisoned in Korea used obscene gestures when photographed to signal distress. The same men would not participate in this behavior under circumstances without stress.

Consider also the very different degrees of intimacy and consequent behavior of the same group of men: at one time floating on a life raft in the Pacific Ocean, and again in the office getting out reports. The tactile gestures will be different; the quality of voice covering different forms of address will be different.

The behavioral events in a crisis situation will be paced more rapidly than in a hum-drum context. The ordering of events may change.

Individual or idiosyncratic conditions must also be acknowledged in the choice of verbal or nonverbal behavior. The degree of fatigue and personal circumstances actually affect syntax. Physical condition alters the voice quality. Women singers, for example, may carefully schedule their performances because of the paralinguistic modification which may occur during the first few days of menstruation, according to Schwalberg.

Style and Function

Finally it remains to consider the aesthetic dimensions and the social approval or acceptance of the communication item. The impact of the message is dependent upon these features of responsibility in communicating.

On glancing back at all these determinants of verbal and nonverbal acts it will be seen that there is considerable overlapping and interaction of networks. One aspect cannot be analyzed in isolation, nor as a static condition, because the features change along with the interaction. The context of situation, then, affects profoundly and certainly, with controlling influence the choices in language, from pronunciation features, to syntax, to larger structures and to nonverbal behavior. An analysis without these considerations could only be done in an extremely narrow sense, and this might be almost useless with regard to meaning.

Applicability of Research

Ultimately the practical value of an academic focus on these matters must be dealt with. Will communication be enhanced between individuals, communities, and nations, by examining the nonverbal subsystems of communication? I think not, contrary to my first assumptions when I seriously started studying nonverbal communication. In fact, bringing these things to attention, other than for scientific purposes, may even be counterproductive to communication. Realtionships can be destroyed by knowing too much, or communicating too much--with all the potential for inaccuracies. There is good reason to doubt the much publicized belief held today that the problem between office mangement and workers, government and people, husband and wife, parent and offspring, are "lack of communication". Rather, the problem may be simply a lack of tolerance or a lack of accepting others as they are.

We may very well see that human beings cannot function with equanimity when too much detail is brought to the level of awareness. The human can cope with only so much. Blind spots are a protection, in a sense. Bringing to attention to a person too much, about the way he fiddles with his hands, or grimaces, or uses over-high pitch too often, will not enhance communication, and may push the individual into isolation.

Another reason for not trying to 'understand' too desperately is found in the difficulties of interpreting correctly the infinite variety of human behaviors. Without having a complete case-history of an individual's background, as well as access to the inner-workings of the mind, it is not possible to be able to translate a person's nonverbal behavior into meaningful identifications in all instances. It is a case where a little knowledge could do more harm than good.

It may turn out that trying to understand the other person beyond the usual daily needs is a neurotic tendency. The demand to make the other person communicate and provoking the other person to talk in the name of 'better understanding' may be a harmful and neurotic goal. A more productive goal would be to accept human differences.

This is not to say that these things should not be studied by the scientist. It is to say, that we should not expect unmerited results. Studying the digestive system in minute detail will not help digestion. Studying a symphony in excruciating detail will not enhance the listening pleasure. Nonetheless, the academic specialist in communication will most certainly study all the aspects of the communication act in scientific detail.

FOOTNOTES

[1]See especially Dell Hymes, "Models of the interaction of language and social setting", in The Journal of Social Issues, 23.2 (April 1967) pp.8-28.

[2]John Steinbeck, East of Eden, Chapter 7, Bantam Books, [1952] 1962.

[3]Marcel Marceau, on the David Frost TV show, February, 1970.

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